



A YOUNG
PUFFIN

MORE LITTLE RED FOX STORIES



ALISON UTLEY

Puffin Books/Editor: Kaye Webb

MORE LITTLE RED FOX STORIES

Many children will remember the lonely little fox cub whom kind Mrs Badger adopted to live with her own two children, and all the trouble he had with his Wicked Uncle, because they will have read it all in another Young Puffin, *Little Red Fox*.

Here are two more enchanting stories about this appealing little fox in which all the animals go joyriding on a merry-go-round at night and brave Little Red Fox loses his heart to a beautiful white rabbit whom he saves from his wicked hungry Uncle, and how even the Wicked Uncle is good, just once – to save the King of the Unicorns from captivity.

No one who has read Alison Uttley's books can forget the spell-binding touch of her imagination, which transforms her solid, believable animal characters in their country setting into something poetic, beautiful and full of meaning.

For readers of six and over.



Alison Uttley

More Little Red Fox Stories

pictures by Katherine Wigglesworth



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Little Red Fox and Cinderella

One day the little Red Fox heard a strange sweet music in the distance. He sat up and listened. He pricked his ears to catch every sound and he sniffed the breeze.

A rollicking tune came through the woods from far away and it set his feet dancing. He leapt on his soft toes and twirled among the ferns. Then away he pranced to tell his foster-mother Mrs Badger and the two little Badgers about it.

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Mrs Badger was in the kitchen making herb pudding, and she had no time to go out and listen. Bonny and Bill ran into the woods and stood there with noses raised to the wind.

‘It’s not earth-music, or wind,’ said Bonny.

‘It’s not screech owls or woodpeckers,’ said Bill.

‘It may be humans,’ said Bonny.

‘It’s not for us,’ said Bill.

‘Well, I like it,’ said the little Red Fox firmly. ‘I want to know about it.’ He danced again, and swung fat little Bonny to the tune till she was quite out of breath.

‘I’ve never danced with a fox before,’ she panted.

‘Even the ferns and quaker-grasses

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and harebells are skipping to that music,' said the little Red Fox, and indeed it was true. All the flowers were gently bobbing in the wind that day.

'Foxgloves are wagging their paws,' added Bill Badger, and he picked a foxglove for the little Red Fox to carry home.

Mrs Badger had finished her cooking and she joined them.

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‘I know what it is,’ said she. ‘I’ve heard it before. It’s the Wakes in the village and that music is the merry-go-round.’

‘Merry-go-round,’ echoed the little Red Fox.

‘That’s you,’ whispered Bonny. ‘You go round, all merry.’

‘Your father sometimes goes to the Wakes, after dark when the people have gone home, of course,’ added Mrs Badger.

‘Can we go, Mammy?’ asked the little Red Fox.

‘It depends,’ said Mrs Badger, ‘if you are a good fox. You can see it in the distance, from yonder hill. Keep to the shelter of the bracken and then you will be safe.’

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So off scampered the three little animals to the fir tree on the crest of the hill. From its shade they saw a wonderful sight. In a field were striped tents and caravans, and a merry-go-round moved slowly with revolving horses. There were swing-boats too, and stalls, with people walking about, all far away.

Bill Badger pushed his paw into the fir tree and brought out an old telescope wrapped in a piece of green cloth.

‘This spy-glass belongs to the keeper,’ said he to the astonished little Red Fox. ‘He keeps it here to find weasels and stoats and – and – foxes. We borrow it sometimes, but we are always careful to put it back just as we find it.’

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He put it to his eye and stared at the Wakes fair. Then he let Bonny have a peep. Finally he offered it to the little Red Fox, who was dancing with impatience:

‘Ladies first,’ said Bill sternly, as Rufus grabbed the telescope from Bonny.

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‘It’s ladies last among foxes,’ said the little Red Fox and he put the spy-glass to his eye. He looked through the wrong end, and Bill waited, smiling to Bonny.

‘It’s a magic tube,’ the little Red Fox muttered. ‘I think it makes everything go away.’

‘Look through the other end, Rufus,’ said Bonny. ‘Everything will come back then. It’s wrong end first with foxes.’

Rufus stared entranced, when he turned the spy-glass.

‘I can see lots of little horses racing round, and boys and girls sitting on them. I can see boats going up in the air, and then they come down. I *would* like to go there. I *would*,’ said he.

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Bill Badger wrapped up the spy-glass and replaced it in the tree. They wiped away their footprints, and smoothed the ferns. Then they went home.

‘Can we go to the Wakes?’ they called as they rushed up to Mr Badger and clung to his knees. ‘We’ve seen it through the spy-glass and we heard the music.’

‘Yes, I’ll take you if you are good little animals,’ said Mr Badger, his eyes twinkling with kindness.

‘Of course we will be good,’ they answered and they danced round him.

Mrs Badger insisted they should all lie down and rest, and she put them to bed when the owls began to call.

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‘I shan’t sleep,’ boasted the little Red Fox.

‘Nor me. Nor me,’ answered the two small Badgers, but Mrs Badger gave them a drink of camomile tea, which is very soothing, and in a minute their heads nodded and they slept.

When the stars told her that it was an hour before midnight she awoke the little company and told them it was time to start, for Mr Badger was ready.

‘I’m not coming,’ said she. ‘Your father will take you. Be good, and

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behave yourselves nicely. Here are a few pennies to spend.'

She gave them each a few little bright stones, which the Badgers call Bawson Pence. They are really flint chippings and arrow-heads, cut long ago by ancient men and lost in the earth. The Badgers find them and



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treasure them, for they are sharp as steel and will cut roots and meat like knives.

Then, with a Badger kiss, and a grunt of laughter, she fastened their jackets and said, 'Good-bye'.

So Mr Badger set off with his children to the Wakes. The moon was shining, the stars were like lamps in the sky, and the earth had a delicious cool scent which made the little Red Fox so excited he turned head over heels all the way down the path.

'The moon's my friend,' said he, waving a paw.

Bill and Bonny trotted solemnly after their father, while the little Red Fox went through his tricks.

'No need to take you to the Wakes.

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You can do all the tricks by yourself. You ought to be in a circus,' said Mr Badger, glancing at the tumbling little fox.

Bonny tried to turn somersaults, but she fell flat on her nose. Bill Badger lumbered along, sometimes on two paws, sometimes on four, but he couldn't dance like the fox.

Then Bill whistled a tune, and Bonny sang a little shrill song, and the fox twisted and leapt and kept them laughing all the way.

They came to the river, and they went over the bridge, where Mr Badger never ventured unless it was night. They stopped to look down at the dark water spangled with stars, and at the crested waves.

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‘If we fished could we catch some stars?’ asked the little Red Fox.

‘You might catch a trout,’ laughed Mr Badger. ‘That would make a nice supper.’

Round the curve of the river came the beautiful white swan, sailing proudly, with her little silver crown on her head.

‘Hello there,’ called Bill and Bonny. ‘Please your Highness, please Princess, will you tell us a story?’

Mr Badger bowed to the lovely bird and the little Red Fox for once had no words. He could only stare at her.

The swan moved quietly over the little waves to the bridge. She waited a moment, looking down at her dim

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white reflection which lay among the stars. Then she began to tell the ancient story of Cinderella.

‘Once there lived a little rabbit. She had to do all the work and nobody loved her. All the animals went to a ball and she was left behind. So her fairy godmother came and dressed her in snowy fur and gave her a pair of glass slippers and sent her to dance with the others. “You must be home before the clock strikes twelve,” said the fairy godmother. The little rabbit enjoyed herself so much she stayed too long, and she was nearly caught by the wicked, wicked —’

Here the swan hesitated, and dipped her head to the water. Then she looked behind her.

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‘Yes?’ asked the little Red Fox. ‘The wicked what?’

The swan moved round and went under the bridge with great dignity.

‘She has lost her glass slipper,’ said she and away she went.

‘That was a queer story,’ said Bill Badger. ‘Why didn’t she finish?’

‘Because she saw somebody, I think,’ said Mr Badger shortly, and he hurried



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the three away from the river, for he too had seen somebody there.

They were getting near the Wakes ground, and the dim shapes of the merry-go-round and the swing-boats showed against the night sky. One or two flares were still alight and a lantern bobbed on a pole. Then they heard merry little voices and a host of small animals appeared, running about the grassy circle, climbing on the backs of the wooden horses, scrambling

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ling into the empty swing-boats, twitching at the canvas covers.

Mr Badger was the only one who could wake the sleeping horses, and rouse the merry-go-round from its sleep. He gave a long low whistle which seemed to fill the air with vibrations. Everything shivered and trembled for a moment, and the little Red Fox lay flat on the ground.

Then the merry-go-round slowly began to move, the horses awoke and shook their silken tails and pawed the air with their painted hoofs. The mir-

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rors glittered, and the music came from the trumpets and organ, not as loudly as usual but subdued, and sweet and mysterious. A gay little tune came down from the stars, and a sad little tune sprang up from the grass. All the music joined together, and flew in the air, with the trees bending their branches to listen.

Bonny and Bill Badger walked forward and climbed on the backs of two horses, and the little Red Fox followed after them. He was surprised and rather frightened at first and he held tightly to his horse's mane.

'Gee-up. Gee-up,' he whispered, and his little wooden horse whinnied and tossed its head and broke into a gallop.

All round them other small animals

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were scrambling on to the horses' backs and soon every horse had a rider except one big prancing animal a little in front of Rufus and the Badgers.

Mr Badger stood below, whistling softly with that same enchanting note, and the merry-go-round swung round in time to the music of the organ and trumpets and drums.

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The little Red Fox turned his head, and on the next horse sat a snow-white rabbit, the prettiest little rabbit one could imagine. The little Red Fox was delighted to see her and he leaned over and stroked her horse's mane. Bill and Bonny smiled at her too, but she didn't take any notice of them. She was watching somebody else who was climbing into the empty saddle on the horse behind.

Oh dear me! It was the Big Fox from the woods! It was the Wicked Uncle Fox, come to the Wakes and now riding on the merry-go-round with all the little innocent animals.

Suddenly the White Rabbit saw the little Red Fox beside her. Two foxes! It was terrible, and she shivered with

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fright, but Rufus wrinkled up his snub nose and tried to make her laugh.

‘We’ll take care of you,’ he sang with the music.

The Big Fox stared with his wicked eyes at the little White Rabbit, and the snowy little animal nervously clutched her reins, and pretended nothing was the matter.

‘Bonny and Bill and little Red Fox!
We’re all of us here,
There’s nothing to fear,
While old Mr Badger is with us,’
sang Rufus.

Round and round they went, in a merry little circle, with the music about them, and the little White Rabbit forgot her anxiety. Now Mr Badger, standing in the crowd of animals

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below, watching the merry-go-round, had seen this play between the big bad fox and the little White Rabbit. He made up his mind it was time to interfere.

He whistled again, and now it was a badger's warning whistle, a shrill curdling note of fear, which made the merry-go-round fly like the wind as the wooden horses galloped madly. The Big Fox held tightly to his horse and shut his eyes.

'A hurricane,' said he, and he kept his seat.

The small animals tumbled off, helter-skelter, they rolled down to the ground. Little Red Fox, the two little Badgers, the White Rabbit, the hedgehogs, the squirrels and hares all fell in

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a heap of fur and prickles at Mr Badger's feet.

At the same moment the village church clock struck twelve.

'White Rabbit,' said Mr Badger, picking up the little rabbit who was rumped and crumpled with fright, 'you'd best go home. It's midnight. Where d'ye live?'

'In a rabbit hutch,' confessed the small White Rabbit. 'I'm a pet rabbit. I ran away. I escaped when I heard the music and I must go home. They'll miss me.'

'You be off at once. My children will take care of you. I must stay here and keep this merry-go-round turning so that the fox won't see you,' said the Badger kindly.

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The White Rabbit was hunting in the grass. 'I've lost my slipper. I've lost my lovely glass slipper,' she moaned.

'Never mind your slipper. Run along,' said the badger, and he sent her off with Bill and Bonny and the little Red Fox for company.

So the two young Badgers, and the little Red Fox ran swiftly from the



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Wakes ground with the White Rabbit between them, but the Big Fox was so busy keeping his hold of his galloping horse he never missed the rest of the company. All alone he rode, faster and faster, under the moon.

The garden gate was shut, but there was a space underneath through which the rabbit crept back to her hutch.

‘Thank you very much,’ said she, as she sat panting by her lavender bush. ‘I did enjoy myself. I wish I had not lost my slipper.’

She held out one little hind foot with a charming glass slipper on it, and another foot with the furry pad.

‘Where did you get them?’ asked Bonny.

‘From a fairy godmother,’ replied the White Rabbit. ‘The river flows at the bottom of our garden and I found them there in the leaves of some comfrey. Two glass slippers and they just fitted me!’

‘Perhaps it was the swan,’ said the little Red Fox. ‘I’ll look for your slipper, Cinder . . . Cinder . . .’

‘That’s not my name,’ laughed the White Rabbit, and she ran back, waving her paw, and disappeared.

When the three returned the merry-go-round was still spinning with the

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Big Fox sitting in state. Mr Badger stopped whistling, the music slowed, the horses came to rest, and the Big Fox climbed down. He took a step and nearly fell, for the ride had made him so dizzy, he could hardly stand. He looked about him, and there was no White Rabbit. Then out of the corner of his eye he spied the little Red Fox laughing at him.

‘Young varmint,’ he cried. ‘Young nephew varmint, have you seen a snow white rabbit?’

‘Yes,’ said the little fox cheekily. ‘She melted away like a snow-flake. She was magical.’

‘Ah, I knew she would melt, she looked so sweet and tender,’ sighed the fox.



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He gave a suspicious glance at Mr Badger, and then he lolloped away.

The little Red Fox saw something glitter in the light of the lantern. He stooped and picked up a tiny glass slipper.

'She *must* have been Cinderella,' he thought.

Mr Badger called his family and took them round the stalls to spend their Bawson Pence. They put the flint arrow-heads and chippings on the stalls, and bought a packet of goodies and some Wakes cakes, a red ribbon and a tin saucepan. Bonny tied the ribbon round her neck. Rufus wore the saucepan on his head, and Bill Badger bought a tin trumpet. Mr Badger chose a bottle of liniment from the Quack's

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stall, for the pains and aches of old Badgers.

‘We must buy something special for your mother,’ said Mr Badger, and they found a little striped apron, just like Mrs Badger’s own striped face.

The little Red Fox was hunting about in the stalls, looking at beads and buns and biscuits.

‘Haven’t you finished, Rufus?’ they asked.

‘It’s that White Rabbit,’ said Rufus.

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‘She had to go home in such a hurry she hadn’t time to buy anything. I want to find something for her.’

‘Let’s give her a watch,’ said Bonny, pointing to a string of penny tin watches.

‘Then she will know when it’s twelve o’clock,’ said Mr Badger, and he put down an arrow-head and took a shining silvery tin watch with a paper face and a couple of hands to tell the time.

They went through the village first, to the house where the little White Rabbit lived. There was no sound, she was asleep in her hutch, so the little Red Fox stretched his arm through the hedge and hung the watch on the lavender bush. By it he placed the glass slipper.

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‘She will be glad when she sees them,’ said he.

‘And we are glad we have seen a real Cinderella,’ said Bonny.

‘We must tell the swan all about it,’ added Bill.

Away they went home, over the bridge, past the river, across the fields to the woods. Mrs Badger unlocked the door and welcomed them with bowls of bread and milk.

She thought the striped apron was a treat, it just suited her. She tasted the Wakes cakes with their caraway seeds, and she said she liked caraway herbs. She said the saucepan would be very useful for porridge, and she was delighted to hear they had seen Cinderella.

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They all slept very late the next morning after so many excitements, but when they got up they could talk of nothing else but the Wakes and the White Rabbit.

Between two trees hung Mrs Badger's clothes-line, and the little Red

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Fox climbed up and walked along it like a tight-rope walker. The two small Badgers tried to follow him but they fell down on their noses.

‘Look at me,’ called the little Red Fox, and up he went again with a ball balanced on his nose.

‘You are a real circus,’ said Bonny admiringly, but Bill shook the tree and down toppled the little Red Fox.

They made a merry-go-round from the low branches of a spreading beech tree and they swung up and down and around, pretending they were on horse-back.

Bill Badger played his tin trumpet, Bonny tootled on an elder pipe, and the little Red Fox had a comb with a grass over its teeth. They marched up

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and down like a band. They made such a din the Big Fox came to peer at them, but he had to put his paws to his ears and run off.

‘They ought to be su-su-suppressed and made into mincemeat for supper,’ he muttered. ‘My nephew is the worst of them all. He made me lose sight of Cinderella, and I did want to dance at

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the ball with her in those little glass slippers.'

'Cinderella! Cinderella! Cinderella!' called the little Red Fox, but only the echo answered, 'Ella! Ella! Ella!'



Little Red Fox and the Unicorn

Mrs Badger was very busy making hot cross buns. The two little Badgers and the little Red Fox danced round the table singing.

‘Hot cross buns. Hot cross buns.
One a penny, two a penny, hot cross buns.
If you don’t like them give them to your sons.
If your sons don’t like them give them to your
daughter.’

‘Quiet,’ cried Mrs Badger, waving her floury paws. ‘Quiet! I can’t think

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with that noise. Did I put in the barm or not?’

‘No you didn’t, Mother,’ said Bill Badger. ‘It’s on the hob warming, you told me to put it there.’

Mrs Badger took the mug of foaming yeast from the hob and poured it into the flour.

‘Oh dear, you mither me,’ said she. ‘I think you children must go out. Go and play in the woods. Don’t go too far from the path, and keep a lookout for the Big Fox, or any strange animal.’

‘We’ll look out for bears and tigers,’ laughed the two little Badgers.

‘I don’t care if I do meet a bear,’ said the little Fox, turning a somersault and nearly upsetting poor Mrs Badger’s bowl of dough.

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‘Out you go, away you go,’ she cried, waving her paws again, and she shut the door and sighed with relief.

The three small animals ran across the field into the wood. There they each cut a stick from a hazel grove, to keep away any wild enemies.

They ran along the grassy path that went through the wood, all among the ferns and primroses, and Bonny threw away her hazel stick to pick flowers.

‘I shall take these home for Mother,’ said she.

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‘Boo! I shall find something better than primroses,’ said Bill Badger. He snuffled and ruffled, and dug into the ground. He unearthed some delicious little roots called pig-nuts, and then he found some mushrooms growing in an open glade. They were umbrella mushrooms, which badgers like, and they resemble half-closed umbrellas.

The little Red Fox took no notice. He went on by himself, down one glade and up another, with the warm sun shining on his red coat so that it looked as if it were on fire.

He was looking for something special for Mammy Badger. Then he saw a hollow tree, with bees coming out of a hole in the trunk.

‘Where there’s bees there’s honey,’

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said he. 'A bit early, but I think I shall get some.'

He took a large stone to the foot of the tree, and stood on it, stretching up to the hole. He put in his paw and scooped out a piece of honeycomb, half filled with the first honey of the year.



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‘Oh! Oh!’ he said to himself, as he took a lick and a bite. ‘This is better than toadstools and flowers,’ said the little fox. ‘It’s as nice as hot cross buns.’

He made a little bag from some leaves, and put the honeycomb inside. The bees were buzzing angrily, and he could understand their language.

‘Little Red Fox, little Red Fox,
You’ve been a’thieving and breaking our
locks.

The King’s in the forest, he’ll make you
behave,

Or carry you off to the moon as a slave.’



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‘Who is the King?’ asked the little Red Fox.

The bees sang:

‘We cannot tell you, we mustn’t speak,
He’s visible only to those who seek.
He’s been in prison a year and a day,
You go and find him with no delay.’

The little Red Fox turned away, but he couldn’t find the two Badgers.

He called ‘Coo-ee. Coo-ee,’ and only the Echo answered him ‘Coo-ee. Coo-ee.’

‘I hope that King won’t catch me,’ said the little Red Fox, for the forest grew darker and the trees huddled together.

‘I hope he’s not a bear or an elephant,’ said the little Red Fox. Then

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he called, 'Bill, Bonny,' but the Echo didn't answer him and he felt very much alone. He leaned against a tree for a minute while he tried to find the sun.

A light was shining through some trees, and he thought it was the sun, but the streak of light came nearer. He was frightened. He pressed close to the shadows and waited, ready to leap into a bush if an enemy should come.

There was a snuffle and a soft crackle of leaves and grass. Then a little horse appeared, very small and bright. It was the most beautiful tiny horse the little fox had ever imagined. Its glossy coat shone with light, its eyes were ruby, and on its head it carried a twisted horn, red, black and white,

which it pushed through the leaves. Its hoofs were silver too. It shivered a moment as it stood in the glade; it was very young, and it saw the little Red Fox.

Then it whinnied with a high shrill cry, and that was enough for the little fox. He fled as fast as his legs would carry him. He dropped the honeycomb and ran like the wind.

There was no sound of hoofs following, and he stopped and turned round when he had gone far enough for safety.

He could see the silver horse sniffing at the honey and then it ate it and it whinnied.

Off ran the little fox again, and he ran and ran until suddenly he found

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the two Badgers, sitting on the ground nibbling the pig-nuts.

‘Quick,’ he called. ‘There’s the King of the Forest and he will catch us. He’s a little silver horse, not much bigger than me.’

So they all went back to the path and ran home.

‘Are you sure this animal had a long horn?’ asked Mrs Badger when the little Red Fox told his tale of adventure.

‘Yes, a long horn like a spear, all sharp and twisted,’ said the little Red Fox nodding his head. ‘It gave out a light like a candle.’

‘It sounds like a unicorn,’ said Mr Badger when he came in, ‘but it can’t be, for unicorns are extinct. They are

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invisible and nobody can see them.'

'I saw one,' insisted the little Red Fox.

'He can see things we can't see,' cried the little Badgers. 'He always spies the birds and the bees and the butterflies before us. He sees drops of dew like diamonds, and he sees spickles and sparkles, Mother Badger.'

'Now no more nonsense about unicorns,' said Mrs Badger firmly. 'Here, take a dose of camomile, Rufus. It will do you good for you must be poorly to see unicorns.'

'I did see a tiny one,' muttered the little Red Fox, but he drank the camomile and curled up to sleep on the rug.

'Too much imagination,' whispered

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Mrs Badger. 'Let him sleep it off, poor lamb.'

The little Red Fox opened one eye. 'Not a lamb, a unicorn,' he murmured dreamily.

A few days later the little Red Fox and the two Badgers went again to the wood to play. The little Red Fox taught them to play 'I'm King of the Castle.' Each animal climbed on a rock and sang,

'I'm King of the Castle,
Be off you naughty rascal.'

He kept the others at bay, pushing them back when they tried to dislodge him. Bill and Bonny could not get on the rock, for the little Red Fox was nimble as a goat, as he pushed them away from his castle.

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Suddenly the little Red Fox was sent spinning, and a delicate shining little horse with a twisted horn tossed him away and leapt to the rock.

‘I’m King of the Castle’, sang the animal and the three looked in surprise. It was the Unicorn himself who had come to play.

He stood with his small silver hoofs firmly on the rock, and although the three pushed and shoved they could not move him.

The long horn kept them off, and he thrust it swift as a sword, never hurting them, but pushing them back.

At last the three gave up, and the little Unicorn sprang down. ‘You’ve won,’ said Rufus, ‘but you wouldn’t win if I were a lion. “The lion beat the

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unicorn and made him lie down", is a song we sing.'

'Yes, I've heard it too,' said the Unicorn scornfully, and he gave them all a little push and rolled them over again.

'Are you the King of the Forest?' asked Rufus. 'You don't look very big.'



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‘No, that’s my father,’ said the small Unicorn. ‘He is the King, but he was captured a year ago, or more, I don’t know how time runs on earth. He was taken by a man, who knows enchantments, and he was shut in a cage. It’s a glass cage, and people come to look at him and pay money because they say he is extinct.’

‘Oh dear, I am sorry,’ said Bonny Badger.

‘I’m very lonely without him,’ continued the little Unicorn. ‘I wish we had never come back to the world. My father told me how beautiful it is, but I would rather be at home.’

The little Badgers wondered where his home was, but they were too shy to ask.

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‘Why didn’t man catch you also?’ asked Rufus. ‘How did he get your father and not you?’

‘Unicorns are invisible to man,’ said the little Unicorn, ‘but man is a magician. This one had a glass through which he spied my father. He threw a lasso of fine steel, as thin as cobweb, over my father’s neck and caught him. I was hiding in the bushes and he did not spy me. I followed and saw the men shut my father in a glass cage. Then I ran back to the woods before they saw me.’

‘We will help you,’ said Rufus boldly. ‘We foxes are nearly invisible. I will ask my Wicked Uncle to help me.’

‘Oh Rufus! You wouldn’t dare,’ cried Bonny.

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‘Yes I would. I would,’ cried Rufus stamping, and he held the Unicorn’s ivory horn and stroked it.

‘We must get a key to undo the cage,’ said Bill Badger. ‘My father may have one. He collects keys. People are always losing them.’

The little Red Fox led the way home to the Badgers’ house, and the Unicorn trotted elegantly with him, and the two little Badgers hurried as fast as they could go to keep up with such an agile pair.

Mr and Mrs Badger welcomed the little Unicorn, whom they could see at once. ‘He’s a real beauty,’ said Mrs Badger. ‘But he isn’t very big.’

The little fox told the sad story of the King’s imprisonment by man, and the

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two elderly Badgers shook their heads in sympathy.

‘Man is an enemy full of cleverness and guile. He gets everyone, and he doesn’t even put them in cages.’

‘Will you show us your keys, Father Badger?’ asked the little fox. ‘We are going to the prison to unlock the door and set the Unicorn free.’

The Badger went to an iron chest in the corner and he showed his bunch of keys.

There were watch-keys and door-keys and cupboard-keys and car-keys and keys of the garden gate. Some were made of heavy iron and some of gold. They hung on a piece of wire and the little fox borrowed them all.

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‘Surely there will be the key we want in these,’ said he.

‘It was a strange lock with two key-holes,’ said the Unicorn.

‘A double key? You’d best ask your Wicked Uncle, the Big Fox, for one of his woodland keys,’ said Father Badger.

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So after a good meal, when the Unicorn ate all the flowers he could find, as well as honeycomb and hot cross buns, they went to the house of the Big Fox.

The Big Fox sat in his doorway gnawing bones, but when he saw the procession of two Badgers, the little Red Fox and the shining Unicorn with his long horn, he sprang to his feet and bowed.

‘Your Majesty,’ said he, ‘I am honoured. Welcome to my humble house.’

The little Unicorn stopped. He didn’t take one step further when he saw the sly face of the Big Fox.

‘Have you any keys?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I have watch-keys and poultry-house keys, and keys of barns and

hen-places and roosting-houses,' said the fox.

'Not those,' said the Unicorn sternly. 'Any more?'

'Yes, I have the keys of the trees,' said the fox. 'Ash keys and sycamore keys and maple keys and acorns and elm keys.'

He held out bunches of these, green and gold and red; fruits freshly plucked from the trees themselves.

The little Red Fox stepped forward to take them.

'Thank you, Uncle,' said he. 'I will repay you sometime.'

Then they all turned away and the Big Fox sighed and sat down. He was disappointed that the Unicorn had not entered his house and seen his snares

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and traps and his guns and pistols.

Then he picked up a silver star the Unicorn had dropped. It gave out a light; it would be useful as a lantern on a dark night and he put it in his cupboard.

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The four animals ran through the woods, with the Unicorn leading. He took them through the trees to a long lane and then across a park to a garden with a wall around it. There was a great gate, but it was open and they trotted through in the dusk.

There stood a large glass cage with a wooden lock. They peered through the transparent glass and at first they could see nothing. Then as they stepped sideways they saw the Unicorn, white as the glass, almost transparent himself. He stood in a corner, sleeping.

‘Father,’ whispered the little Unicorn and the beautiful animal moved and opened his ruby eyes.

‘My child,’ said the Unicorn, and he

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lunged against the glass with a terrific clash and then sank down weeping.

Quickly the guard ran out to see what was the matter, but the waiting animals glided into the bushes.

‘Hush ye,’ said a man’s voice. ‘Ye can’t get out so you’d best grin and bear it. When you are tamed then the master will let you go into the garden, but at present you must be kept in this cage.’

He gave the Unicorn a handful of grass, saying ‘I wish I knew what Unicorns eat. This is not his proper food.’

‘We live on lilies and dew,’ whispered the little Unicorn, ‘but we like honeycomb and roses, too.’

The little fox took out a piece of

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honeycomb from his pocket and kept it ready.

Soon the man retreated to his hut and the four went back to the cage.

The little Red Fox took the gold watch-key and inserted it into the lock. Nothing happened. He tossed it away saying, 'Gold is no use for a Unicorn.'



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Then the small Badgers tried with a door-key, a car-key and the key to the garden gate, but the keys were no use.

‘Try one of the keys of the trees which the Big Fox gave you,’ they said to the little Red Fox. ‘They come from the woods where the Unicorn once lived.’

So the little Red Fox put the sycamore key into the double lock, one part to each keyhole. They turned easily and the glass swung open. Out stepped the Unicorn. The little creature ran to his father and whimpered with joy, and the little Red Fox danced around on tiptoes. He offered some of the honeycomb to the hungry Unicorn, who ate it at once.

Then they set off, past the keeper’s

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house, through the big gate into the park, and over the green moonlit hills. The little fox led them back to his home, and the two Unicorns trotted softly behind him, making no sound at all. He took them to the door and Mr and Mrs Badger welcomed the King of the Forest.

‘Where do you come from, O King Unicorn?’ asked Mr Badger, and the little fox listened eagerly for that was the question he also wanted to ask.

‘From the kingdom of the moon at the gates of heaven,’ answered the Unicorn proudly. ‘Once we lived on earth, but a thousand years ago we went to the moon, as we were becoming extinct on earth.’

‘My father told me about this lovely

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star called Earth, which we can see from the moon,' interrupted the little Unicorn, 'and I begged him to bring me here. It is more beautiful even than I expected. Green trees, shining many-coloured rivers, grass soft as snow under our feet, flowers with delicious perfume, and lilies which we love. But man caught my father, so it isn't safe for us to live here ever again.'

'Oh, I wish you would stay,' said the little Red Fox, and the Badgers agreed.

'We will stay a few days with you, in this part of the wood, and then we must return,' said the King Unicorn. So Mrs Badger put fresh sheets of hay on the floor of the shed, and Bonny and Bill laid branches of green beech leaves on the floor for carpets. Mr Badger

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made a channel for the spring water to run through the hut so that the unicorns could have plenty of clear water. They brought an old stone trough for the water to be held.

Little Red Fox gathered lilies and asphodel and all the finest flowers for the Unicorn to eat, and Mrs Badger made delicious cakes of wafer thinness with sugar and spices. The Unicorn told them about the stars, and the planets and the moon. He said the earth was the nicest star of all, and they must keep it clean and beautiful. He told them also about light, which comes from the moon.

‘Man could see me because he used some special light,’ said he. ‘That is why he put me in that glass prison,

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which was made of special glass, for people to see the invisible inside it. He has found one of the secrets of life.'

Then the Unicorn showed them how he could jump high in the air, higher and higher until he could leap up and not return.

The little Red Fox tried to leap in the same way, but he always came tumbling down again.

'No moon for you, little Red Fox,' said the Unicorn. 'Luckily you are



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not in danger of becoming extinct.'

'I wish the Big Fox were extinct,' said Rufus, rubbing his elbows. 'I know he lent the sycamore keys, but he is very cruel, and he eats all the hens and rabbits.'

'He has done a good deed helping us to free the King,' said Mr Badger.

'I shall bake a large cake with lots of raisins and sugar in it for the Big Fox, and I will make a sugar-icing hen to sit on the top,' promised Mrs Badger.



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The little Unicorn played with the two young Badgers – hide and seek in the woods, seesaw on a tree trunk, and swinging on the bough of a beech tree. At night Mr Badger told the little Unicorn tales of the earth people, about children going to school, about Christmas and Easter and midsummer with haymaking, and winter with snowballs and sledging.

‘We make snowballs on the moon,’ said the little Unicorn. ‘You can throw them for a mile, they are light as a feather. I can jump a mile too.’

‘Oh I wish I could go there,’ sighed Rufus.

‘No Mammy Badger and no Bill and Bonny! No fields and woods and good solid earth! Little Red Fox you

are better down here on the earth,' said Mrs Badger, and she sent the little fox and the Badgers off to bed.

At last the time came for the Unicorns to go home.

Everyone was sorry to say good-bye; even the hedgehogs and the moles and the hares were sad to lose the company of the exciting pair, the King Unicorn and his small son.

'Good-bye. Good-bye. We will think of you, and we will bow to the moon and you on it every time there is a new moon,' said Mrs Badger.

'Good-bye. Thank you, earth people. Good-bye,' called the Unicorns and they floated up in the air till they were only little silver specks in

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the sky. Soon they disappeared altogether.

One moonlight night three little silver balls came floating down, dropping to the door of the house in the wood.

They were presents from the little Unicorn, bouncing balls that never kept still, and the little Red Fox and

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Bill and Bonny played with them for many a day.



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Mischievous, kindhearted Little Red Fox is busy again, squiring a beautiful white rabbit to the moonlit, starlit fair, protecting her from his Wicked Uncle, and planning a fine rescue for the captive King of the Unicorns.

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